



Washington State Senate

The Benton Bulletin

17TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR DON BENTON

APRIL 28, 2005

Dear Friends,

As always, it has been my pleasure to report to you about what has happened in your state Capitol during the regular 105-day legislative session. Session is now completed, and the following are some major things I would like to share with you.

LEGISLATURE APPROVES REPEAL OF I-601

Despite efforts by Republicans to stop the repeal of Initiative 601, just enough votes were garnered to send **Senate Bill 6078** to the governor. Governor Gregoire signed the bill into law, allowing tax increases to be approved by a simple majority vote of the Legislature – whereas I-601 required a two-thirds vote. The measure also changes how state government's spending limit is calculated. Under I-601, the cap was tied to population growth and inflation. SB 6078 ties the spending limit to 100 percent of personal income growth. This increases the spending cap from 7 to 11.5 percent.

2005-07 OPERATING BUDGET goes to the governor with \$400.5 million in new taxes to pay for a 12 percent spending increase. Despite my vote against the plan, the final budget approved by the Legislature:

- revives the state's death tax;
- defers state pension funding obligations;
- adds the sales tax to extended warranties;
- ups the tax on cigarettes; and
- increases the tax on liquor.

Senate Republicans offered a no-new-taxes spending plan for the next two years that met the state's needs and used the state's improved revenue forecast to increase spending for college enrollments, eliminate day fees at state parks, and fully fund the education initiatives. The plan was largely ignored by the Democrat majority.

Local Clark County capital construction projects:

- The Lewis and Clark Confluence Project – \$2 million;
- The Vancouver Barracks Project – \$1 million;
- The Columbia Springs Environmental Education and Research Facility – \$700,000;
- The Clark Center for Community Health – \$3 million;
- Washington Wildlife Recreation Program – \$90.67 million statewide (six Vancouver-area projects are likely to be funded); and
- The Columbia River Channel Deepening – \$17.7 million.

TRANSPORTATION REVENUE PACKAGE

The final \$12.5 billion transportation revenue package, which **I VOTED AGAINST**, contains the following tax and fee increases:

- 9.5-cents to the state gas tax over four years (3 cents in 2005; 3 cents in 2006, 2 cents in 2007; and 1.5 cents in 2008)
- A new weight fee on vehicles (\$10 for small vehicles, \$20 for medium-sized vehicles, \$30 for large vehicles, and \$75 for motor homes)

☒ **Senate Republicans were successful in getting a provision included for the state auditor to conduct performance audits of the state transportation system.**

Local Clark County transportation projects:

- Columbia River crossing – \$50 million;
- SR 14 Camas/Washougal – \$40 million;
- I-5 from Salmon Creek to I-205 – \$40 million;
- I-5/I-205 Interchange – \$40 million;
- SR 500/Johns Blvd. – \$26 million;
- 502 widening – \$50 million;
- I-205 Mill Plain – \$58 million; and
- SR 501 Ridgefield – \$10 million.



Senator
Don Benton

Committee assignments:

- Financial Institutions, Housing & Consumer Protection, ranking Republican
- Government Operations & Elections

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IMPORTANT ELECTION REFORMS IGNORED

- ✓ No photo ID is required to vote at the polls.
- ✓ In addition to not requiring proof of U.S. citizenship to register, no identification at all is required to register to vote.
- ✓ No random checks of voter registration rolls for dead people, felons or non-citizens are required.
- ✓ The filing period for candidates is not moved to an earlier date to allow more time to get ballots out to military and overseas voters.
- ✓ No provisions are included to allow military ballots to be counted if they are received late and therefore returned after Election Day.
- ✓ No help for auditors in managing elections.
- ✓ No solid signature verification.
- ✓ No prohibition against third-party access to voter information to stop vote-shopping.

IDENTITY THEFT BILLS GO TO GOVERNOR

I co-sponsored both of the following bills:

- ✓ **Senate Bill 6043** requires any agencies, individuals or businesses that maintain a computerized database with encrypted personal information to notify customers if there has been any breach of security. Customers injured by a violation of this notice requirement may bring civil action for damages.
- ✓ **Senate Bill 5418** allows victims of identity theft to place a security freeze on their credit reports. This prevents the reports from being released and in most

cases will stop thieves from being able to open credit card accounts or other services requiring a credit check.

BENTON BILLS SIGNED INTO LAW

- ✓ **Senate Bill 5317** protects insurance consumer information from public disclosure when the state insurance commissioner investigates an insurer.
- ✓ **Senate Bill 6064** guarantees your constitutional right to free speech and expression by prohibiting homeowners' associations from banning political yard signs before an election.

BENTON PROPOSAL AWAITING GOVERNOR'S SIGNATURE

- ✓ **House Bill 2212** protects schoolchildren from predatory teachers by requiring the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to revoke or suspend certificates of teachers found intentionally viewing unauthorized sexually explicit material on school grounds for a first offense. A second offense requires OSPI to permanently revoke a teaching certificate (originally Senate Bill 5677).

Again, it was my pleasure to provide you brief updates throughout the legislative session. As always, it is my pleasure to serve you. Please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Don Benton

DON BENTON
State Senator, 17th District

Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about. Or call the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000.



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